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We've heard our relationship referred to as "extraordinary" and "unusual." Well, we believe it is. We are Members of Congress from the Central Valley and we work together on more issues than not. Is this typical for Republicans and Democrats? Unfortunately, no. Typical for a few guys from the Central Valley? The answer - yes.

We realize it's rare to see any true bi-partisan work being accomplished lately in Washington. Unfortunately, the majority of Congress' efforts are being consumed in political battles instead of focusing on genuine problems. As the people we represent understand, we have a long, strong record of working together for the Valley on issues important to all of us who live here.

As you know too well, California's economy has been buffeted by many challenges over the years. Increased traffic and congestion coupled with high gas prices are almost too much for our residents to take. With gas and oil prices constantly on the rise, most agree on the need to have a national energy and transportation plan that will help with the cost of fuel, shave time off commutes and help rebuild the economy.

In Congress, we've worked together and passed the Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (TEA-LU) containing funding for projects running through our districts. Traffic jams we face daily have become nightmares. They represent time stolen from watching our kids' soccer games, having dinner with our families or any number of other activities that are more important than waiting in traffic.

Anything we as legislators can do to alleviate traffic congestion will build the quality of life for residents and commuters just passing through the area. This effort deserves more than just a representative looking out for the people in his or her jurisdiction. Just as traffic moves from one district to another - we realize this is everyone's problem, and we should all be committed to the solution.

Years ago, our Nation's leaders had the foresight to construct massive dams and reservoirs to provide water supplies to a thirsty western United States. But as times have changed, our nation's infrastructure has not kept pace. Here in California, no federal water storage projects have been built in a generation--while the population has increased by nearly 15 million. In the Central Valley alone, there are 1,600 miles of levees, various water storage areas and reservoirs that can be used in times of flooding. Unfortunately California's flood protection system is an aging infrastructure with major design deficiencies and it has been weakened by deferred maintenance and lack of funds.

Although states and localities are trying to meet these needs through various means, the federal government can help by encouraging water technologies, maintain in current projects and building more storage. We have taken steps forward in funding through several bills within Congress, such as the recently passed CALFED. We will continue to look for avenues to help with funding for levees and overall water quality. Many repairs and maintenance projects require millions of dollars to be spent on environmental reviews, and mitigation for environmental impacts and delay these much needed repairs. We will continue to work through a process that would streamline such requests which would allow protection to be provided in a much more efficient fashion.

Another important issue we are working on is High Risk Pest Detection, making sure we are meeting the needs of many farmers and ranchers in the Valley. Family farms produce the safest, most affordable food supply in the world and the need to protect goods greater than ever. With the increasing movement of people and commerce, our environment and food supply is at serious risk from the accidental or intentional introduction of exotic and invasive species. We are working together on pest prevention to provide the greatest level of protection against plant and animal pests and diseases that can adversely impact human health, commerce, and the Nation's precious natural resources.

We are sure some in Congress and elsewhere dislike watching Republicans and Democrats work together on common goals, or don't believe it's actually possible. After all, Washington is famous for its examples of partisan politics. However, we Members from the Valley pride ourselves on our long history of working together to make a difference in the lives of people we represent. Of course, we don't agree on everything, but we don't let that get in our way. At the end of the day, we still think we've got something pretty special.